N A T I O N A L B E S T S E L L E R

Books of The Times

Kennedy Assassination Answers

By CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT

A simple point accounts for the force and freshness of Gerald Posner's "Case Closed," a persuasive new study of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Amid the mounting welter of conspiracy theories, one set of facts tends increasingly to get overlooked: those having to do with the biography and character of Lee Harvey Oswald, whom Mr. Posner tries to prove once and for all was the lone assassin.

A former Wall Street lawyer and the author of "Mengele: The Complete Story" and "Hitler's Children," among other books, Mr. Posner has interviewed nearly 200 people, including several new witnesses, among them the K.G.B. agent who handled Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union in 1959. He has reindexed the 26 volumes of the Warren Commission Report, discovering in the process how the only other subject index, the one by Sylvia Meagher, reflects what he considers a bias toward Oswald's innocence. For instance, Mr. Posner says he found more than 50 citations about Oswald's potential for violence, whereas Ms. Meagher found only 23. And he has availed himself of new scientific and computer enhancements of important evidence, most pertinently the film of the Kennedy motorcade taken by Abraham Zapruder.

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One result is a brilliantly illuminating section on the timing of Oswald's three shots and the path of the missile dubbed the "magic bullet" by skeptical assassination buffs for its seemingly miraculous destructive powers. Here Mr. Posner reasons convincingly that the first shot was fired much

refutes hundreds of claims that have added up to conspiracy theories involving the Federal Government, the K.G.B., the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Cuba, opponents of Fidel Castro's Cuba, a cabal of Corsican assassins and, of recently fashionable vintage, members of organized crime.

Particularly telling is the author's analysis of an acoustical study done by the House Select Committee on Assassinations (1974) ostensibly proving that four shots, not three, were fired that day at Dealey Plaza in Dallas. Mr. Posner concludes that the analysis was of a tape recording made nearly a minute after the assassination occurred, and that the recorder's microphone "was on a motorcycle stationed at the Trade Mart, where the President's luncheon reception was scheduled." This explains why the shots were not obviously audible on the tape and why the sound of whistling could be heard instead of the purported pandemonium.

In an appendix about the claim that many witnesses to the assassination have met violent deaths, the author suggests that since more than 10,000 people were connected to the Warren Commission investigation, the incidence of violent death is in actuality tiny. He also wonders why "no major writer or investigator on the case — even those trying to expose dangerous conspiracies — has died an unusual death."

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Case Closed

Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of J. F. K.

By Gerald Posner.

Illustrated. 607 pages. Random House. $25.

text I know of. In Mr. Posner's hands, both Oswald and Ruby seem far too unstable to have been involved in any conspiracy. And for those who believe that their nuttiness is exactly what suited them to be tools of intrigue, Mr. Posner offers persuasive evidence that no practical way existed for either of them to have been manipulated.

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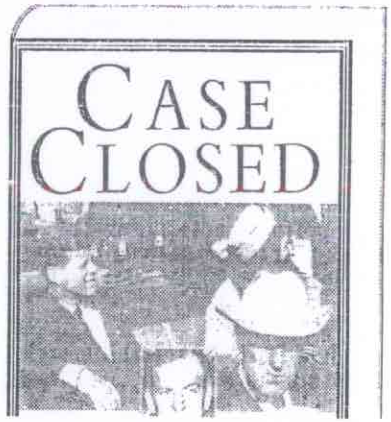
Of course, the case will not be closed as a result of this study, which was published just as the National Archives was releasing 90,000 Government documents on the assassination. There seems to be a greater need for conspiracy theories accounting for President Kennedy's death than mere reasoning can satisfy.

As well as demolishing all those theories, Mr. Posner accounts for their persistence: bad luck, mistiming, miscommunication, lack of technical sophistication in examining

THE CONTROVERSIAL BESTSELLER ALL AMERICA IS TALKING ABOUT...



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One result is a brilliantly illuminating section on the timing of Oswald's three shots and the path of the missile dubbed the "magic bullet" by skeptical assassination buffs for its seemingly miraculous destructive powers. Here Mr. Posner reasons convincingly that the first shot was fired much earlier than previously thought (it missed), thereby giving Oswald ample time to load, aim and fire the next two. The middle bullet was able to make its way intact through President Kennedy's neck and John Connally's chest and wrist because it had a full metal jacket and was tumbling in its path. (Diagrams in the book's appendix help make this analysis absolutely clear.) It was the last bullet, he concludes, that inflicted the mortal wound to President Kennedy's head.

Elsewhere Mr. Posner effectively

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But the spine of "Case Closed" is a detailed portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald's life that sharpens the focus on areas hitherto overlooked or left murky. This reveals what a profoundly disturbed childhood Oswald had and what an extreme inclination for violence he evinced as he developed. As Mr. Posner details the events before the crime you can almost feel Oswald developing into the madman who could commit such an act.

And the same can be said of the book's treatment of Jack Ruby, whose emotional disintegration after the President's death is more vividly dramatized here than in any previous

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As well as demolishing all those theories, Mr. Posner accounts for their persistence: bad luck, mistiming, miscommunication, lack of technological sophistication in examining the evidence, evasions by the F.B.I. and C.I.A., the less than total thoroughness of the Warren Commission's work and a sense of disproportion in the public's mind between the gravity of the crime and the stature of the accused.

Mr. Posner quotes William Manchester, one of President Kennedy's biographers, as saying: "If you put the murdered President of the United States on one side of a scale and that wretched waif Oswald on the other side, it doesn't balance. You want to add something weightier to Oswald. ... A conspiracy would, of course, do the job nicely."

But such a dismissal of Oswald amounts to a disparagement of the human mind and its capacity for scaling the peaks of grandeur and perversity. Because Lee Harvey Oswald wasn't important doesn't mean that his mind, once sufficiently twisted, couldn't conceive an important crime. By paying deserved attention to that mind, Mr. Posner has restored the balance between the perpetrator and the crime. The result is more satisfying than any conspiracy theory because at every step its explanation is clearer and more elegant.

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ABOUT...

CASE CLOSED

Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK

GERALD POSNER

A Selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club
A Main Selection of the History Book Club
A Selection of *Reader's Digest* Today's Best Nonfiction

RANDOM HOUSE

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